

of 'the few' in Battle of Britain

anniversary of Second World War conflict with parade

By Andrew Streat

THE 65th anniversary of the Battle of Britain was marked in Maidenhead on Sunday.

The annual gathering included a service at St Mary's Church in High Street where the packed congregation, including Second World War veterans, paid homage to the sacrifice made by the young pilots in 1940.

The battle, immortalised in Winston Churchill's speech about the courage of

'the few', took place over the English Channel between July 10 and October 31 as RAF fighter pilots fought off the attacking German Luftwaffe.

The heroic pilots, who numbered fewer than 3,000 and were outnumbered four to one, successfully fended off the German airborne invasion at a cost of more than 500 British and Allied lives.

The remembrance service in Maidenhead was followed by the traditional parade past the town hall by members of Maidenhead

and Slough branches of the Royal Air Forces Association and young members of the Air Training Corps (ATC).

As the Town Hall in St Ives Road is currently being refurbished, local dignitaries, including MP Theresa Mayor, Mayor and Mayoress Cllrs Eric and Heather Wiles and other borough councillors stood outside the library opposite to take the salute from the passing parade.

Afterwards a reception was held at York Stream House.

Maidenhead ATC cadet Charlotte King, of Clare Road, was taking part in the parade for the third year running.

The 16-year-old said: "I think it's amazing what the pilots in the war did and very brave of them."

"I'm proud to be in the air cadets."

Mayoress Mrs Wiles added: "It was a splendid service and I'm delighted to see the cadets here."

"I thought it was a wonderful occasion and a great turnout too."

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IMPOSING: The parade through Maidenhead in celebration of the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Britain was an impressive affair. Ref:90135/10



PAST AND PRESENT: Second World War veteran Bill Cox watches on as RAFA and Air Training Corps cadets parade past. Ref:90135/6



FUEL CRISIS: Bill Cox is no stranger to a fuel crisis as he discovered in Dubai during the war. Ref:90135/27

'We filtered the fuel through an old vest'

BILL Cox was busy training to fly when the RAF fighter pilots battled it out in the skies with the Luftwaffe.

With one brother in the army and another in the navy, Mr Cox signed up to the RAF in 1940 aged only 19. The 85-year-old Burnham resident spent much of the war overseas flying Catalina flying boats in the Middle East and Asia.

As a flight engineer in F212 Squadron his crew patrolled the air to keep a watchful eye on the enemy and act as a deterrent.

On one occasion they were forced to land in Dubai when they ran out of fuel. Mr Cox said they were directed to a commercial airline's old dumping ground where they found about 400 half-empty four-gallon cans of fuel.

He said: "It took us half a day to get the cans over to our plane and fill her up. The fuel had sand in so we filtered it through an old vest."

"It was an interesting time. I thought about that time the other day when queuing up for fuel at the petrol station."



'It still send tingles down my spine'

ERIC Collins, 85, from Fifield Road, Bray, signed up for the war aged 19 at the start of the war and eventually worked as part of a photographic reconnaissance team.

During the Battle of Britain he was at a dummy airfield in High Barnet which drew the bombs away from the real airfield in London.

In September 1940 he went to an airfield in Southern Rhodesia to be in charge of petrol supplies, before returning to Britain to train in photography.

He worked as part of a

ground team developing photographs taken by Mosquito aeroplanes flying over Belgium, Holland and France, which were then used for drawing up maps.

He said: "I had one or two near misses during the war. Returning from Cape Town to Glasgow an enemy submarine launched a couple of missiles at us and when we were in Belgium a doodlebug blew up our tents."

"I also saw the Allied bombers flying over Arnhem and it still sends tingles down my spine to think about it."



IN THE PICTURE: Eric Collins was part of a reconnaissance team producing maps. Ref:90135/29



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